TODAY'S LECTURE 1/30/09

Cognitive Meaning and Emotive Force

Definitions

Evaluating Definitions

COGNITIVE MEANING & EMOTIVE FORCE

- The *cognitive meaning* of a sentence is the information conveyed.

- The *emotive force* of a sentence is the emotion the sentence expresses or tends to elicit.

LOGIC DEALS WITH COGNITIVE MEANING

- Sometimes one can be easily swayed by emotional phrasing *instead of* reasons. Consider:

- Should capital punishment be abolished? No way! The inmates on death row are nothing but human vermin.

- You think vile acts of carnal fornication should not be censored on cable? We must take the higher ground and censor such filth. Besides, if we don't it will ruin our precious innocent children – won't somebody think of the children?!

PLEASE NOTE

- It is not as if eliciting emotional responses has no place in reasoning or in moving each other to action. In general, it's not a battle between reasons and emotions.

- The main idea is that being swayed by a speaker's word choice is not by itself a good reason to adopt their conclusion. Though:

- "If you have a logical argument to back up a conclusion, there is nothing wrong with stating it in such a way that your audience will endorse it with their feelings as well as with their intellects" (115).

3.1 # 18

Would it be wrong to fight a nuclear war? Yes, of course. Just imagine it: Millions of people vaporized in a few moments. Millions more, including children and the aged, literally melting from the intense heat. Of those who aren't killed immediately, many freeze to death as great clouds of dust block out the sun's rays. The rest perish in agony from the nasty effects of radioactive fallout.

DEFINITIONS

Extensional and Intensional

WE NEED DEFINITIONS TO RESOLVE AMBIGUITY AND VAGUENESS

- Ambiguous words have more than one meaning:

- He *lies* in his grave.
- The *bank* is usually crowded at noon.

1. The sky *is* *blue* .
2. Sadsy *is* *blue* .
3. So, the sky *is* Sadsy

- Vague words have borderline cases

- That pile is a *heap* .

- Granny is *bald* .

- Sammy is *rich* .

DIFFERENT TYPES OF DEFINITIONS

Extensional Definition

- Specifies the meaning of a term by indicating the set of things to which the term applies.

Intensional Definition

- Specifies the meaning of a term by indicating the properties a thing must have to be included in the term's extension.

EXTENSIONAL DEFINITIONS

- Specifies the meaning of a term by indicating the set of things to which the term applies.

- **Ostensive** definition: one specifies the meaning of a term by pointing to objects in its extension. These are typically representative samples.

- **Enumerative** definition: names the members of the extension individually

EXTENSIONAL DEFINITIONS

Virtues

- Can avoid ambiguity
- Provides concrete non-disputable instances

Vices

- Some terms do not have extensions, so they can not be pointed to or enumerated.
  - The definition of 'unicorn' is ___?___.

- Other terms pick out things that we cannot point to
  - What I mean by 'proton' is this [pointing]

- Extensional Definitions can also fail to provide any illumination.

- Suppose somebody is offering a definition of 'beauty'. What is beauty? Well, they say,
  - Sunsets are beautiful
  - The refraction of light perceived as colors is beautiful,
  - Helen of Troy was beautiful

How illuminating is that?

INTENSIONAL DEFINITIONS

- Specifies the meaning of a term by indicating the properties a thing must have to be included in the term's extension.

- Can take care of the 'unicorn' problem. 'Unicorn' means a horselike creature having one long, straight horn growing from the center of its forehead.

(or something along

those lines)

- Note we do not need to point to a unicorn to grasp the meaning of this definition.

INTENSIONAL DEFINITIONS

Lexical Definition

- Reports the established meaning of a term
  - E.g. Dictionaries

Stipulative Definition

- Specifies the meaning of a term independently of convention or established use
  - John Wheeler introduced 'black hole' to mean a star that had collapsed on itself due to gravity.

Theoretical Definition

- A **Theoretical Definition** of a term is one that attempts to provide an adequate understanding of the things to which the term applies

- "Pure" and natural sciences make use of theoretical definitions.
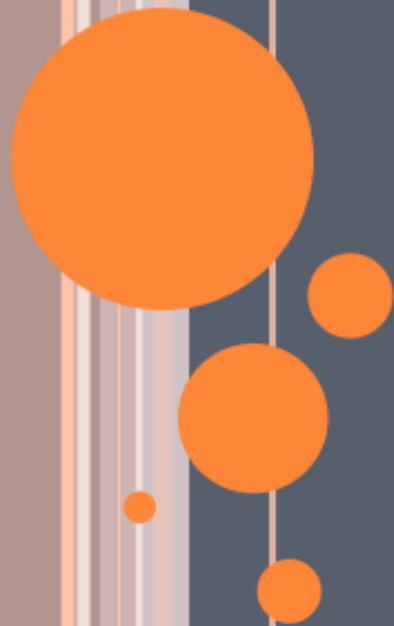
THEORETICAL DEFINITION

- A **Theoretical Definition** of a term is one that attempts to provide an adequate understanding of the things to which the term applies

- Examples from philosophy: definitions of knowledge, moral permissibility, mentality, love, beauty etc.

- Examples from science: definitions of water, genes, evolution, strings etc.

- A famous analysis of knowledge:

Jones *knows* that P

if and only if

Jones has **a justified belief** in P and P is **true**.

EVALUATING DEFINITIONS

CRITERIA FOR DEFINITIONS

1. Should not be too wide

- A wide definition includes things that do not belong

- E.G.
  - A "human" means a mammal with two legs.
  - "Planet" means a thing that orbits stars.
  - "Chair" means a thing you sit in.

2. Should not be too narrow

- A narrow definition does not include things that do belong

- E.G.
  - "Human" means a self-aware language user.

CRITERIA CONT.

3. Should not be obscure or figurative

- "Evil" is defined as the darkness that lies within the human soul.

- "Art" is the stored honey of the human soul, gathered on the wings of misery and travail.

4. Should not be circular

- "Coward" means a spineless person.

- "Blue" means having a bluish color.

- "Wise person" means one who displays wisdom.